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# Industry Legend Patricia Ziska Retires from MCI



In September of 2022 MCI announced that Patricia Ziska would be retiring at the end of the year. By then she will have amassed more than 46 years of service to the bus industry having started in the office of Hausman Bus Sales and moving up to one of the highest industry positions in marketing and customer service. Pat has not only become a legend in the bus business, but her presence has obviously made the industry a better place. MCI.

by Larry Plachno

Motor Coach Industries recently announced that Patricia Ziska would be retiring at the end of 2022. In addition to being a wife and mother, Pat has spent her life working with bus owners and has become one of the most respected people in the field. On December 6, 2022 she will mark 46 years of involvement in the bus industry. In a business where customer service, customer support and customer loyalty are important, she has become a legend. For many years she has been successful in maintaining a great relationship between MCI and its customers while being appreciated by all. Pat originally started with Hausman Bus Sales which has an interesting background with MCI. For those who do not know, or have forgotten, we can take a minute to explain about MCI and Hausman in earlier years.

Following an anti-trust suit against General Motors buses filed by the U.S. Department of Justice, Greyhound began looking for another source of coaches and turned to MCI in Winnipeg. MCI had been building coaches for Greyhound of Canada and were

partially owned by them. In 1958, MCI was acquired by Greyhound Corp. and soon began to develop new models suitable for Greyhound in the United States. MCI opened their new facility in Pembina, Minnesota in 1963 to finish these coaches and soon began delivering their MC-5 model coaches to Greyhound.

Expectedly, other coach operators saw the new MCI coaches and wanted them too. Unlike Greyhound, a company that handled its own support and used coach sales, other operator customers required some sales and customer support. Many of them also wanted to trade in older coaches. To provide this type of support to MCI customers, Hausman Bus Sales was appointed as MCI's exclusive U.S. distributor on May 1, 1972. Founded in 1946 to handle used parts and equipment from Greyhound, Gerald Hausman had developed the company into a parts and used coach business. Headquartered in Chicago, by 1968 the company had branch offices in New Jersey and California plus other, smaller locations.

With secretarial and shorthanded training, Pat Ziska started working for Hausman Bus Sales on December 6, 1976. At that time Hausman was still located at the old facility on Archer Avenue just southwest of Chicago's downtown. Reports are that she quickly won over Hausman executives. MCI sales grew so rapidly in the following years as MCI moved into the leadership position in the market that Hausman soon outgrew the existing facility. In 1983, the company moved to a larger and better facility in the northwest suburb of Des Plaines at the corner of Golf and Mt. Prospect Roads [see the October, 1983 NATIONAL BUS TRADER for details].

Pat's talents in sales and marketing may have come from her father, Thomas Delaney, who was a building material salesman. One of his favorite sayings was: "Take care of the customer. That's what good salesmanship is about; nothing matters if the customer isn't satisfied." Pat's mother was a teacher who gave her a deep appreciation for knowledge. Pat obtained her Bachelor of Science Degree while working at Hausman Bus Sales. She



MCI ran a pair of coaches coast-to-coast to support the AASHTO convoy marking the 50th anniversary of the U.S. interstate system in 2006. Expectedly, Pat Ziska was on hand to meet the convoy and spread publicity for the bus industry and MCI. After the convoy arrived in Washington, Pat poses with Peter Pantuso from the American Bus Association (left) and MCI Bus Driver Dave Kane (right). MCI.



Pat usually represented MCI at the trade shows including this United Motorcoach Association show in Las Vegas in 2005. The people from Louisiana Coaches Trailways saw the new MCI D4005 on the show floor and decided to buy it. Shown are Peter Cotter, MCI executive vice president of sales; Louis Sanders and his father, Don Sanders, of Louisiana Coaches; Pat Ziska, MCI vice president of marketing and major accounts and Rob Lessor, MCI regional sales manager. MCI.

also completed several MBA courses at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management. She and her husband, Jim, have three boys and a daughter: Jim, Matthew, Mike and Kaitlyn.

Her tenacity, determination and intelligence were recognized at Hausman Bus Sales where she took on more responsibility and began adding to her list of accomplishments. Already by 1985 Pat was in charge of the service coordinators who supported customer orders through the factory. A major change came in 1989 when MCI acquired Hausman Bus Sales and began merging sales and customer service into the parent company. Expectedly, Pat moved into and up in the MCI sales and service organization.

At MCI, Pat began assuming more responsibility in sales and customer service. In 1996 she became the first female vice president at MCI and took over the Central Regional Sales Team. Four years later, in 2000, she moved up to the position of vice president of marketing and major accounts. In this position she began working with many of MCI's top tour and charter accounts. This was a very responsible position since these accounts were responsible for a substantial portion of MCI's sales.

Under her direction, MCI's customer open house events were expanded and road shows were developed that were well attended. These events encouraged MCI

customers to come and see the latest models and hear about what new developments were on the horizon. Noteworthy achievements included working with celebrity spokesperson and bus industry supporter John Madden through all five of his MCI coaches. She also put famous basketball legend Michael Jordan in an MCI "D" series coach when he played for a baseball team in Birmingham, Alabama. In addition, Pat was heavily involved with the launch and introduction of several key MCI models including the Renaissance (E4500), the now industry-leading J4500, the new design D4505 and D4005 as well as the ultimate LX model.

Pat took on substantial responsibility in sales, marketing and customer service during her career. She was active in advertising, public relations, trade shows and industry events. A few of the special events included the AASHTO 50th Anniversary of the Interstate Highway System and the MCI Go Green campaign. She took charge of press events and directed the MCI marketing staff in charge of advertising materials, sales literature and the MCI Website. She was also responsible for *FYI from MCI*, a customer e-newsletter that started with a few hundred customer readers and later grew into a circulation of thousands.

After celebrating 30 years in the bus industry, Pat moved up to a new role at MCI in 2007. Recognizing her abilities to work with customers, she became the vice president, chief customer service officer for MCI. This was a new position for both MCI and the industry.

Larry Killingsworth, MCI's then vice president of sales and marketing, explained the new position. "Pat has focused on the customer for the past 30 years. Now we have a position that is

Over the years, Pat Ziska has been an MCI spokesperson with customers and at industry events. She promoted MCI's local Open House events and has usually been on hand for most major industry events. Here, Pat meets with the Beach Boys at an MCI event in October of 1996. MCI.





Over the years, Pat Ziska was heavily involved with running the MCI Customer and Open House events. This one in 2010 took place in Joliet, Illinois at a racetrack so MCI could show its new driver assistance system. NBT.



This MCI Customer Rally event took place at the MCI facility in Des Plaines, Illinois in 2016. Pat Ziska lines up for a photograph with several others in front of a new MCI J4500 going to Village Charters. NBT.

solely responsible for finding new ways to win for the customer. Pat has put her own stamp on the industry in a way that very few executives have been able to do. This position gives her a chance to get even closer to the customer as we begin to roll out a number of new initiatives." In this position, Ziska will also take on a bigger role with industry associations.

By 2007, Pat was already well known and respected in the field. Her movement into this new and unique position was mentioned in an article in the January, 2007 NATIONAL BUS TRADER that brought forth compliments from industry leaders. "She is the backbone of the industry, and respected by all of her peers," said Victor Parra, president of the United Motor Coach Association. "There is no one else like her."

John Crosswell, president of Crosswell Bus Lines in Williamsburg, Ohio, knew Pat from her earliest days at Hausman. His comments were probably reflected by many in the industry who had the pleasure to work with Pat. "Pat brings class, dignity, professionalism, good humor and grace to our industry. Even then she stood out. As she rose through the management ranks, Pat never overcompensated or changed; she has been able to keep her style. She's unique because she demonstrates unwavering loyalty for the customer, her company, coworkers and to the industry – all at once. We who know her are blessed."

In reply, Pat offered her own thoughts. "I love MCI," she said. "I'm extremely proud of what we've accomplished. When I see an MCI coach going down the road,

I feel a great sense of satisfaction that all of us at MCI contribute to the confidence our customers have in our brand. Operators know they can send an MCI model out with groups of people to get from point to point with peace of mind. We're trusted."

After her 2007 promotion, Pat continued working with customers and put additional effort into events and associations. The MCI Rally and open house events gave customers an opportunity to meet with the MCI staff and suppliers, see the latest products and hear about new developments and directions. While many were held at several MCI Service facilities nationwide, some events took place in special locations like race tracks to showcase new systems and development. Pat worked with associations, helped present MCI-sponsored customer awards and became active with the Women in Buses group.

In 2007, Patricia Ziska celebrated 30 years in the bus industry and moved up to a new role at MCI. Because of past success in working with customers, she became the vice president, chief customer service officer for MCI. This was a new position for both MCI and the industry. MCI.



Typical of the esteem Pat received from associations was being given the Alliance Partner of the Year Award by the International Motor Coach Group (IMG) in 2010. The Award honors Alliance members that have demonstrated exceptional service and commitment to the industry and especially to IMG members. She was chosen by IMG members as the year's recipient of the yearly award from among her industry peers.

"IMG recognized Pat for her support of our organization, her leadership role in forming the Motorcoach Council and the commitment she has to the industry as a whole," said Steve Klika, president of IMG. "She and her MCI team are engaged in every aspect of IMG. She is a great friend to us and the industry. We appreciate her commitment and leadership."

"We're very honored to have Pat singled out for the award," said Tom Sorrels, MCI president and CEO. "She goes the extra mile



When not behind her desk, Pat could be found helping customers and delivering new coaches. Southeastern Stages celebrated its 80th anniversary in 2013 with an outing to an Atlanta Braves baseball game. From left: Ed Shipman, Marlene and Bill Hughes and MCI's Pat Ziska and Pat Scully. MCI.

for each and every MCI coach owned and is trusted by all. She greatly deserves the honor, and we extend our congratulations."

In 2011, Pat took another step up the ladder at MCI. In her former role as vice president and chief customer officer Pat was responsible for MCI's private sector sales to major accounts, MCI's sales force in Canada and had responsibility for executing MCI's marketing programs including internet and

Web-based communications as well as public relations.

Pat had been behind MCI's "Go Green, Go Coach, Go MCI" campaign that supported the environmental benefits of motor-coach travel. She also has been serving as MCI's representative to a number of industry organizations and marketing groups including the American Bus Association and Trailways.

Patricia Ziska was very active in working with associations and presenting awards. Luke Busskohl, Arrow State Lines COO (left), and his brother Alex, corporate operations and marketing specialist (right) accept the MCI-sponsored 2019 UMA Environmental Leadership Award from Pat Ziska, MCI vice president of new coach sales, at the 2019 UMA show. UMA.



December of 2018 found Pat Ziska in Tuscaloosa, Alabama delivering MCI's first 35-foot J3500 coach to Cliff Dorsey and the staff at Tuscaloosa Charter Service. MCI.

Now, in 2011, after 35 years in the industry, Pat was named vice president of sales and marketing for the private sector. In this new role, Pat was responsible for the new coach private sector sales representatives in the United States and Canada as well as the company's marketing group. In making the announcement, Rick Heller, MCI chief executive officer, said: "It is without question that our customers and sales team have the highest regard for Pat. She has the credentials and deserves this

In 2011, after 35 years in the industry, Pat was named MCI's vice president of sales and marketing for the private sector. Pat became responsible for the new coach private sector sales representatives in the United States and Canada as well as the company's marketing group. MCI.



On January 26, 2017, Patricia Ziska was honored with a Women in Buses Award at the ABA Marketplace in Cleveland for her unparalleled industry knowledge, pioneering leadership and personal touch. The Women in Buses award recognizes the role of women in the motorcoach industry who work collaboratively on issues and concerns of women business leaders as well as industry specific trends. Pat, who holds one of the highest positions in the industry, had just recently celebrated 40 years in the bus business the previous December.



role. She is not only dedicated to MCI, but ultimately to our customers' success. I look forward to working more closely with Pat as well as our sales team to further improve our market share and maximize our customer relationships.

Several people commented that it was hard to keep up with Pat. When she was not at her desk in the office, she was active with customer events, making coach deliveries to customers and working with customers and presenting awards at shows. Noteworthy examples include Pat's involvement in founding the Motorcoach Council in 2007 that helped educate and support bus operators in marketing. In 2008 Pat established the American Bus Association's Green Spirit Award as a way to recognize operators promoting the environmental benefits of motorcoach travel. This included MCI's green tool kit for operators to use to promote their efforts to passengers and clients alike.

"She is magnificent to deal with. She knows what's she's doing and puts our business first. She's focused on what's in front of her and on her job. She's picked up a wealth of knowledge and that's a great asset to us and the industry," said John McCommon, owner of Cline Tours in Mississippi.

"She is the most genuine, dependable person we've dealt with in this industry," said Allen Lamers, president of Green Bay-based Lamers Bus Lines. Lamers built a 52-year career in the charter and school bus family business he ran with his brother and

children. "[Pat] is a credit to the industry all around. She's no-nonsense. Doesn't miss a beat. She follows through, stays in touch and takes care of things. MCI is fortunate to have her."

Pat had just celebrated 40 years in the industry when she received another award. At the ABA Marketplace in Cleveland on January 16, 2017, she was honored with a Women in Buses Award for her unparalleled industry knowledge, pioneering leadership and personal touch. "MCI salutes Pat on receiving this prestigious and well-deserved award," said Patrick Scully, MCI executive vice president of sales and marketing. "We're proud of her accomplishments at MCI and dedication to helping customers at every turn. Pat has always believed customer needs and passenger desires come first."

In 2015, MCI was acquired by New Flyer. Initial changes were minimal and Pat continued on doing what she did so well. After the pandemic hit in 2020, a new company-wide transition was put in place called "NFI Forward" to rationalize business units and facilities in the light of the new normal. As a result, NFI and MCI were combined into one business unit. The combined company continued offering all models of transit buses and MCI coaches. Work was already underway to offer battery-electric power. Pat continued to lead the private new coach sales team.

It was on September 6, 2022 when MCI announced that Pat would be retiring at the end of the year, soon after completing 46

years in the industry. To help with the transition, Tom Wagner had rejoined MCI and would be working alongside Pat. Tom originally joined MCI's public sector sales team in 2005 and was involved with the D-series coach including coaches to New Jersey Transit as well as the launch of compressed natural gas and hybrid electric power trains. He rose to a vice president position before leaving in 2020.

"MCI has provided me with an astounding career, and I value the friendships I've made along the way," Pat said. "Our leadership team will be strengthened by Tom's contributions, and I look forward to many more MCI milestones ahead of us."

It would be difficult for me not to add my personal comments after having known Pat through most of her bus industry career. I had visited Hausman Bus Sales looking for buses for a municipal operation I was working with when Pat first started there. NATIONAL BUS TRADER was founded a year after Pat joined Hausman. While there have been bus industry people who developed a reputation for customer service and were respected by bus operators, Pat took this to a substantially new and higher level. I know of no one who served in this area for as long and brought customer support and service up to this professional and comprehensive level. She is unique in the industry and many of us respect her for that. Thank you, Pat, for a job well done. Our wishes go with you for a great retirement. Our bus industry is a better place because of what you have done and what you accomplished. □

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